

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CCO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00
DOTE-00 EB-07 H-01 INR-07 IO-13 L-03 NSAE-00
NSC-05 NSCE-00 SP-02 OC-06 PRS-01 SS-15 USIE-00
USSS-00 SY-05 FAA-00 WRD-01 MCT-01 SCA-01 VO-03
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P R 111422Z JUL 77
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3868
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 4342

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (MRN 4342 VICE 4324)

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS SY
SUBJ: HIJACKED KUWAITI AIRCRAFT

REF: DAMASCUS DAO MSG 101149Z JULY 77

1. SYRIAN MEDIA GAVE EXTENSIVE PLAY TO EVENTS SURROUNDING
HIJACKING OF KUWAITI AIRCRAFT WHICH ON GROUND DAMASCUS
AIPTOT JULY 10 FROM APPROXIMATELY 0730L-1700). FIRST BROADCAST,
SHORTLY AFTER AIRCRAFT
LANDED, STRESSED HIJACKERS HAD TOLD SYRIAN AUTHORITIES THAT
THE FACT OF THEIR HAVING DIVERTED AIRCRAFT TO DAMASCUS HAD
NOTHING TO DO WITH SYRIA. (COMMENT: THIS ITEM WAS PERHAPS
FEATURED BECAUSE OF INITIAL REPORTS FROM KUWAIT THAT HI-
JACKERS WERE DEMANDING RELEASE OF PALESTINIAN PRISONERS JAILED
IN "VARIOUS" ARAB COUNTRIES.) MEDIA LATER QUOTED FROM ALLEGED
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STATEMENT BY SOME OF HIJACKERS THAT INCIDENT HAD BEEN CAUSED
BY FRICTION WITHIN FATAH AND IN PARTICULAR RESULTED FROM
PERSONAL GRIEVANCE OF GROUP'S ORIGINAL LEADER, ABU SA'ID,
IDENTIFIED AS FORMER LEADING SECURITY OFFICER FOR FATAH.
ACCORDING UK AMBASSADOR, SEVEN HIJACKERS WERE INVOLVED.
ABU SA'ID WAS OLDEST IN GROUP IN HIS MID-40S. NUMBER
TWO IN GROUP IDENTIFIED AS ABU SHADI WHO TOOK OVER LEADER-

SHIP FROM ABU SA'ID AFTER DISPUTE WHILE PLANE PARKED IN DAMASCUS. REMAINING FIVE ARE PALESTINIAN TEENAGERS.

2. SHORTLY AFTER MID-DAY WHEN PLANE HAD BEEN REFUELED, AIRCRAFT COMMANDER REQUESTED PERMISSION TAKE OFF. AT THAT STAGE, HIJACKERS HAD REPORTEDLY DECIDED TO MOVE FROM DAMASCUS TO EITHER ALGIERS OR TRIPOLI AND ALGERIAN AMBASSADOR WAS CALLED TO AIRPORT. HOWEVER, JUST AS AIRCRAFT BEGAN TO ROLL, PILOT ADVISED CONTROL TOWER THAT HIS "PASSENGERS" HAD ORDERED HIM TO STOP PLANE AND RETURN. (MORE COLORFUL VERSION, APPARENTLY UNTRUE, IS THAT NAJI JAMIL RADIOED HIJACKERS PLANE WOULD BE SHOT OUT OF SKIES BY SYRIAN MISSILE BATTERY SHOULD IT TAKE OFF.)

3. BRITISH AMBASSADOR, WHO ALLOWED INTO CONTROL TOWER FOR BRIEF PERIOD AND WHO SPENT MUCH OF DAY AT AIRPORT MONITORING COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN PLANE AND SYRIAN AUTHORITIES, REPORTED THAT ATMOSPHERE WAS GENERALLY RELAXED. HE REPORTS THAT AIR FORCE COMMANDER NAJI JAMIL PLAYED THE DOMINANT ROLE IN NEGOTIATIONS ASSISTED BY CHIEF OF AIR FORCE INTELLIGENCE COLONEL MOHAMMED AL-KHOULI, MINISTER OF INTERIOR DABBAGH AND ARMY COS SHIHABI. SHAHABI ADVISED UK AMBASSADOR AT END OF INCIDENT THAT HIJACKERS HAD SURRENDERED WITHOUT CONDITIONS AND WOULD BE JAILED AND INVESTIGATED.

4. COMMENT:
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SYRIAN MANAGEMENT OF HIJACKING APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN SKILLFUL. HIJACKERS THEMSELVES WERE DIVIDED OVER THEIR GOALS AND REPORTEDLY REACHED BREAKING POINT WHEN THEY REALIZED THEY HAD BEEN CAUGHT UP IN PRIMARILY PERSONAL DISPUTE BETWEEN ABU SA'ID AND FATAH LEADERSHIP. WHETHER THERE WERE ANY OTHER MOTIVATIONS FOR HIJACKING STILL UNCLEAR. JULY 9 KUWAITI REPORT QUOTED ABU SA'ID AS SAYING HIJACKING WAS STAGED IN REACTION TO ARREST OF ONE OF HIS FOLLOWERS TOGETHER WITH 17 FATAH MEMBERS BY PLA COMMANDER IN DAMASCUS. AS POSSIBLE PARTIAL CONFIRMATION OF THIS ALLEGATION, WE NOTE PLA COMMANDER WAS REPORTEDLY FIRST TO BOARD PLANE FOR NEGOTIATIONS AFTER IT ARRIVED HERE.
MURPHY

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